

AUDIO – Don't give fire a chance this Christmas



Scottish Fire Chiefs have united to urge Scots to protect their homes over the festive season as new statistics show that fire casualties rise by a third at this time of year.

As homes come under increased risk, with accidental house fires rising by a fifth, people are being encouraged to take extra care and ensure they have working smoke alarms to give them early warning in case the worst happens.

Analysis of fire statistics over the past ten years show accidental fires started by smoking, cigarettes and matches rise by almost half whilst candles and portable heaters also contribute to the increased fire risk with incidents of both doubling.

With Christmas and New Year bringing a range of extra hazards into the home, Fire and Rescue Services are urging people not to be complacent, particularly when drinking alcohol, and advising that extra care should be taken when cooking.

James Campbell, Chair of the Chief Fire Officers Association Scotland (CFOAS), said:

“A fire in the home is devastating, whatever the time of year. But statistics show that the risk of this happening over the festive period increases significantly. Firefighters deal firsthand with people who have suffered such a terrifying experience. We don't want it to happen to you.

“There are simple steps you can take to protect you and your loved ones and your most valued possessions from fire. Top of the list is a working smoke alarm. Test it every week. It

gives vital early warning if fire does break out allowing you to raise the alarm and escape from harm's way in good time.

“If you don't have a smoke detector or if you know someone living without one, particularly an elderly relative or friend who may be especially vulnerable, we can help. Fire and Rescue Services across Scotland provide a free Home Safety Visit service where firefighters will fit a smoke alarm for free and also discuss how to prepare an escape plan and identify any specific fire risks in your own home.

“When fire does strike it can destroy property in a short space of time, leaving people unable to stay in their home and facing, in some cases, months of restoration work. Tragically some people will not escape with their lives or suffer serious injury and the repercussions of that can last a lifetime. Everyone is busy at this time of year but taking a few minutes to think about your fire safety this Christmas could be the most important thing you do all year.”

We spoke to David Lockhart the Community Safety officer at Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service about the steps you can take to keep safe:-

[A few minutes with Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service \(mp3\)](#)

Roseanna Cunningham, Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs, said:

“We want everybody to enjoy the Christmas festivities this and every year in a way which is safe from the dangers of fire. However, as these new figures show, we see too many family celebrations ruined by accidental fires in the home at this time of year.

“The Scottish Government, the Fire and Rescue Services and our partners continue to work hard educating people about the dangers of fire, and the most important message we can give is

never be complacent and always be on your guard, particularly when drinking alcohol.

“Our campaigns are raising awareness of the risks of fire, be it alcohol consumption, smoking, cooking accidents, misuse of electrical appliances or the overloading of electrical sockets, but more can and will be done to encourage everyone to take fire safety seriously.”

To minimise the risk, each home should have working smoke alarms which are tested weekly to provide early warning of the onset of fire.

There were more than 6,300 fires in the home in Scotland in 2010-11. Of these around half didn't have a working smoke alarm or no smoke alarm at all. In the same year, 40 people lost their lives in house fires and over 1,100 people were hurt or seriously injured.

Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSV), or Home Fire Visits, are a key prevention tool. They take around 20 minutes and are free. They are delivered by Fire and Rescue Service personnel who help people assess fire risks in their home, offer fire safety advice and where appropriate install a free smoke alarm(s).

People can **text FIRE to 61611** to request a free Home Fire Safety Visit or visit www.dontgivefireahome.org for fire safety advice.